tying the knot

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tying the knot

by Anonymous

Summary

Gale tells him he asked Marge to marry him. Gale tells him Marge said yes.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

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John's heart jams itself up his throat. His brain doesn't quit on him totally, but it's a near thing. The thought that surfaces first is *How're you gonna fuck her, Buck?*

He's got the answer in the next second. Doesn't even need help. Dutifully—Gale will fuck her dutifully, like he does everything else. The same plodding, steadfast way Gale goes on surviving in here, like they don't all see the noose tightening in their peripherals.

He says what he's supposed to, though it feels dragged out of him, and sounds like it too, he thinks. Afterward he curls up on his side in his bunk, leaving Gale to put out the last lamp left burning in the room.

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Gale's face when he'd told John floats around like soup scum at the top of his brain the next day. It was not the mug of a happy husband to be. The way he waved the fact out ahead of himself, the way he put John to bed with it. What was that? Now that he can look past his own feelings, John wonders how much Gale even wants it. Might be easier if Gale believes he'll never have it. Maybe it's easier, if they do die in here, to die at least trying to be the man he ought to be. Gale Cleven, straight as an arrow and faithful to boot.

John walks the muddy length of the yard with his hands in his pockets, toeing loose the patches of weeds that've survived trampling and the long weeks of no sun. If there's one thing he knows about Gale, it's that he can convince himself of anything, so long as it serves the greater good.

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"You're gonna make yourself sick on that."

It's the first thing Gale's said to him all evening. He's radiated quiet disapproval ever since John walked in the door smelling of the hooch

he traded all his carefully hoarded cigarettes for. He has the rest in an old Coke bottle, and it's disappearing faster than he would've liked.

"You know, champagne is customary at weddings," John says, and it's not a non-sequitur, not for him. "Or are you gonna be this tight-laced then, too?"

John's cognizant of the way the room shifts around them, men stiffening in their chairs and dragging their eyes down to fix firmly on anything but the Majors having it out again. He takes another swig from the bottle. What's any of it worth to him? Propriety, the big show of order: they're just good boys minding their manners all the way into their graves.

When Gale doesn't answer, John leans forward from his bunk and offers out the bottle. "C'mon. It'll be good practice."

Gale's jaw flexes. It stands out even more than it used to because he's dropped so much weight, sometimes John hurts to look at him. He's severe down to the cut of his bones.

"Only drunks'll try to drag a man down like that," Gale says acidly, "because they're so damn lonely they have to make men in their image."

A spike of pain lights up the back of John's skull, one of the spots he'd been hit during his roundabout journey to the stalag. He never got it looked at, but it's healed, mostly, so whatever's wrong with it is probably sealed in with him.

"Hell, I'm not lonely Buck," he says, "I've got you. At least till Margie puts you to work. You know how I mean. Or maybe you don't have any practice with that, either."

There's a second there where John's sure Gale's gonna hit him. Everything in John strains forward, asking for it. He can almost imagine it: Gale splitting his knuckles on John's teeth. Knock something loose, maybe. Give John something to remember him by. Gale stands and John's blood sings.

"You're a rotten drunk, John," Gale hisses through his teeth, then crosses the room to the guys at the table. "Deal me in, Benny," he says. He angles his chair to put his back to John.

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In John's dream of the wedding, he's responsible for the ring, and he pulls it out from under his tongue. Gale takes it without looking, shines it on his lapel and slips it on Marge's finger. They serve dead cat alongside the champagne. When John gives his toast, he says, *I crashed a plane for him,* which isn't true. And: *I fell fifty-five thousand feet,* also untrue. Then, lastly, *it was me that named him Buck.*

He tries three times to dance with Marge, and on the third time, she lets him. Her hands are Buck's hands. It's all he can think about. Then, when the venue empties out and the happy couple drive off, John looks down and he's left wearing Marge's white pumps. They hurt his feet. Gale kneels to remove them one at a time. You're gonna get frostbite like that, John, he says. He slides John's garter down his leg and off the end of his foot. His hands are his own.

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John wakes up with cold spunk drying tacky in his shorts. For the first time in a long time, it takes a second to remember exactly where he is. His hangover chews at the very edges of him, but hell, even that's a kind of comfort. He stares up at the slats of the bunk above him and feels unexpectedly light.

None of them are getting out of here.

Gale's not getting married, John's not gonna be his best man, his ring bearer, the weight around his neck or the man in his bed. John can still dream a new wedding every night. Sometimes, in those dreams, Gale will come back for him.

He climbs out of his bunk and goes for a quick wash. It's almost a shame to wash the ejaculate off his thighs, but there'll be more—in the limited number of nights he has left, he feels sure there will be more. He whistles through his breakfast of Red Cross rations. A couple of guys throw him furtive looks of concern, and he inclines his head grimly at them, mock-serious, then breaks out into a grin. These poor dopes, he thinks. Strung along by uncertainty and hope.

Gale's avoiding him, he's pretty sure. He hasn't said another word to him since their fight last night. That's fine, he thinks. Gale needs this. John'll give him something to brace himself against. A routine to define himself by.

He goes out to the yard. There's a little bit of snow still clinging to the ground. The day's cold, but bright. He squints up past the nearest guard tower with its turret and the hard, suspicious face behind it. The sky's even a little blue, pockets in the grey.

He bums a cigarette off Crank, who doesn't look happy to see him. He holds John's rabble-rousing against him, John knows. Even the sight of Crank's pursed little frown makes him happy. He only just stops himself from planting a kiss on Crank's cheek. Curt would've let him. Gale would never. Ah, well. It'll all get evened out in the end.

John takes his smoke elsewhere; Crank's watching him too closely, the guy's gonna give himself a headache. He nabs himself a spot on the steps outside their bunkhouse. He says hi, how's it going, to everybody that passes by, cigarette dangling from his lips while he smiles at them.

His smoke's not half gone when Gale finds him. The little furrow in his brow tips John off; somebody sent Gale after him. A man can't even have a good day without it being somebody's problem.

"Major," Gale says curtly. He takes a seat beside John, his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped between them.

"Major," John nods at him. "Nice weather, huh?"

Gale narrows his eyes at John, just a bit. "You feeling better this morning?"

"Felt fine last night," John says, which might not be true, but it's so far away now it hardly matters. "C'mon, there's sun. You saying you don't like that?"

He holds his hand up to where the sun's just managing to make itself known through the sheet of clouds. Then he spreads his fingers and lets the light through in shards. Turns his hand this way and that, considering.

John hums, takes the stub of his cigarette, and extinguishes it on the back of his ring finger between the top two knuckles.

“Jesus, Bucky!” he hears Gale saying, and John turns mildly to him. Gale’s eyes rove his face like he’s looking for an explanation. “What the hell’s wrong with you?”

“Aw, cool it,” John says. He blows ash from his finger and examines the angry red burn beneath, black in places where the ash stuck wetly to it. “It’s nothing. You think I didn’t have worse just getting here? Hell, you probably did too, blowing in that farmer’s back door the way you did.”

“I didn’t choose that,” Gale says, a little too loudly. He casts a look around but nobody’s paying them any mind. When he speaks again it’s quieter, urgent. “I don’t know what this is, John, but I need you to keep it together. How’re we supposed to make it outta here with you acting like a loony?”

John reaches out with his unburned right hand and pats Gale on the cheek. “Oh, Buck,” he says fondly.

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John was right—that night he wakes up midway through the dream: he knows it’s midway because the couple are still exchanging their vows. Gale’s are half pre-flight checklist and half what John’s subconscious knows to be a conversation between Gale and his father. Intercooler’s cold, not a fairy, sir, no, fuel transfer switch and valve, I wasn’t looking at him; I wasn’t looking anywhere.

He almost feels guilty about the ache between his legs, but not quite. John takes himself in hand and tugs himself off quick and dirty. His spend drips down over the back of his knuckles and stings where it comes in contact with the cigarette burn. John lays back, panting, and rubs it into the burn like a salve. Nothing else in the room or the rest of the world moves. His heart goes on beating into the dark.

End Notes

thank you for reading! and tysm to bella for the beta! i'm @drylite on tumblr, for other mota shenanigans

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